

The "Theological Rule" of Nilus Cabasilas

I. INTRODUCTION

I am compelled to interrupt the series of anti-Palamite documents I have been editing to address a brief writing referenced by the contemporary adversaries of Gregory Palamas as the theological basis of the new Byzantine belief of the 14th century.

In the antirrhetic of John Kyparissiotes on the Trinitarian problem of the distinction between the divine essence and attributes, which was the next in line after the edition of Argyrus ¹, since it concerns the same issue and is precisely following Argyrus in the same Vatican manuscript that serves as my guide, I find these words, introducing a documentary citation: "Your most learned one [the followers of Palamas] in so far as he has esteemed to gain knowledge, proceeds thus in the word which has its origin in the 'Theological Rule', precisely in these words" ². The citation of the author follows, who, although presented as anonymous by Kyparissiotes, was well known to the scholars of his time. It sufficed to mention the title of the work, already widely disseminated, without a doubt.

Well then: that author is none other than the famous Nilus Cabasilas, who, according to Kyparissiotes, is the pinnacle doctor regarding the scientific apparatus of the Palamite teachings; who, so to speak, sets the keystone precisely in the writing in question of the bold and new theology of Gregory Palamas.

Already previously, I presented this writing among the genuine works of the Thessalonian and successor of Palamas, as entirely Palamite ³. However, still unpublished, this occasion provides the opportunity to finally make it fully known, according to the precious manuscript from the Vallicellian Library in Rome, which I have been able to study. It is from the 15th century, miscellaneous and by many hands, measuring 220 x 145 mm, made of very strong paper, forming a thick volume of a total of 557 folios, bound in sturdy boards covered with dark red leather, with blind tooling and large

¹ M. CANDAL, S. I., A Trinitarian writing by Isaac Argyrus in the Palamite dispute of the 14th century. *OrChr Per* 22 (1956) 92-137

² JOHN KYPARISSIOTES. Cf. ms. Vat. gr. 1102, fol. 31.

³ Em. CANDAL, S. I., Nilus Cabasilas et theologia Sancti Thomas de processione Spiritus Sancti. *Studi e Testi*, 116. Città del Vaticano, 1945. (See pp. 31-34: 8-9).

bronze nails ⁴ . It is one of the codices from the collection of Leo Allacci, and now bears the signature 87 (F 22).

The Cabasilian dissertation occupies six full folios, from 428 to 433, written in beautiful calligraphy. It does not have paragraph distinctions, which we introduce in this edition, to group within the same number each set of related ideas; although starting from folio 430r the red initials of some words can serve as divisions. The names of the Fathers cited anonymously in the text are also indicated in red in the margin, along with a note that draws the reader's attention to a passage from pseudo-Dionysius. We reproduce it in the apparatus, as well as the patristic marginal notes, although only when it is impossible for us to provide the exact reference for the citations on our own; because we do not believe that all these marginal additions should be attributed to Nilus Cabasilas, since he usually takes care to name the author he cites in the text, even when making vague and insufficient citations.

Thus, we now provide the faithful transcription of the famous Palamite document, illustrated with the corresponding Latin version. After it, we will add, finally, some theological observations, as suggested by the attentive reading of Nilus.

⁴ See B. MARTINI, *Catalog of Greek manuscripts existing in Italian Libraries. II. Catalog of Greek codices kept in the Vallicellian Library in Rome*. Milan 1902. (See pp. 148-151).

II. TEXT OF NILUS CABASILAS

1. Presentation of the problem (numbers 1-4).
2. The divine nature is not the same as the divine hypostases (numbers 5-6).
3. Neither is the divine essence the same as the divine natural properties (number 7).
4. The divine persons and divine operations are also different (number 8).
5. However, all of this is uncreated, although it can well be said that the uncreated is one and the same (numbers 9-11).
6. It is a mystery revealed by the Holy Spirit to those who are worthy of it (numbers 11-12).
7. In some way, this can be explained with examples from the sensible world (numbers 13-14).

Saint Father Nilus Cabasilas, Archbishop of Thessalonica, concise dissertation on that saying of Saint Gregory of Nyssa, misinterpreted by the Acindynian heretics, which states that nothing is uncreated except the divine nature. Where it is shown that not only the nature of God but also His natural properties are uncreated.

1. The rule of theology is that homonymous terms be distinguished and appropriate meanings applied to things. Thus, those who are instructed are placed outside of error. It reads: Distinguish the homonymy of names, the meanings of words, and the properties of terms through which the truth is apprehended. Therefore, since the term "nature" is used by theologians in various ways, it is necessary for me to expound its meanings according to the stated proposition, so that it may be known which of these meanings is being discussed. For in this manner, when the theological proposition is clarified, it will be consistent both with itself and with others; those reading it will not be troubled if they hear theologians affirming at one time that there is only one uncreated, namely the divine nature, and at another time that there are three uncreated ⁵ ; nor will they be disturbed when the Fathers explain the operations of the Spirit, if they assert that these are countless due to their multitude and beyond ages, and that they themselves existed before ages and are uncreated.

2. We therefore establish that the divine nature is called the common essence of the three divine Persons. Divine nature is called divine hypostasis, as the blessed Cyril asserts, writing to the Asians: The nature of the Word of God is incarnate, that is, the hypostasis. And Athanasius the Great: For he says that the unbegotten is not the cause of the essences, but the essence. Here it is clearly necessary to think of essences as hypostases; otherwise, we will confess multiple Essences in the Trinity, and our position will not be far from the madness of Arius. Even Saint Gregory the Theologian, in his oration in praise of Heron, took natures as hypostases. Similarly, Dionysius the Areopagite in the book on

⁵ This is one of the author's foundations to argue against theological principles that there are several uncreated things in the divine apart from the essence, e.g., divine operation. But one must pay attention to what I later discuss in the fourth observation (page 264 85).

the celestial Hierarchy ⁶ . The nature also implies natural properties, as when we say, according to various acceptions: the nature of fire is both to burn and to shine and to be carried upwards. And as Saint Gregory writes in his poems: "For the nature of my Trinity is to bestow felicity." And in another place: "You write against a man for whom writing is natural, just as water flows and fire heats." Moreover, the divine nature and God Himself are called, namely, the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But Aristotle, in the categories, called those things that stand by themselves the primary essence: for instance, Peter, or Paul, or this rock, or this plant. In this sense, the term nature occurs when the great Gregory states that nothing is uncreated except the divine nature ⁷ .

3. What then is the meaning of such a statement against those asserting a distinction in the divinity between essence and divine operation, since the latter is also uncreated? For if he who says "God" leaves nothing out that pertains to God, neither the essence, nor the hypostasis, nor the natural and essential operation, but encompasses all under this one term, the statement no longer turns against them, but rather supports them. Nevertheless, if the opinion of others affirms that nothing uncreated is considered except the divine nature, while ours, and not theirs, introduces the aforementioned distinction and the uncreated operation, perhaps some reason might be provided to them to say that the divine nature in this place means not God Himself, but the common essence of the three persons. However, if he who makes this statement, above all, knows both the distinction and maintains that the operation is uncreated, should we not rather seek a way to show that the theologians are consistent with themselves? Or, conversely, shall we declare them heirs to those things that even a vile person would not tolerate, and assert, due to difficulty, that the blessed Fathers clash doubly, while they disagree with themselves and hinder others from having faith in them?

4. Nevertheless, if they repeatedly say the same, namely, that only the divine nature is uncreated, while nature then

⁶ The intent of Ps.-DIONYSIUS is entirely different, and indeed the word "nature" does not exist in the place misquoted by CABASILAS. There, it intends to explain how all divine things, even those that have appeared to us, are known solely by participation... we touch the mystery and the super-essential with the cessation of all operations of the mind when we see no divine effect that is similar to that cause which surpasses all excellences. On Divine Names, II, 7: MG 3. 645 AB.

⁷ On the mind of St. Gregory of Nyssa, see the second observation on page 260 85.

implies the common substance of the most blessed Trinity, why do they introduce the Persons? Do they consider them uncreated, or do they place them among creatures? For if they say the operation is created because it is something other than nature, which alone is uncreated, it will be clear that, by this very assertion, they also fall into blasphemy against the divine hypostases. For if hypostasis and essence, when it comes to God, are not the same among theologians, and only the divine nature is uncreated, it is evident that the divine hypostasis would be created. Therefore, in placing the divine operation among creatures, they are also caught making the divine hypostasis created. According to them, God is both uncreated and created: indeed, uncreated concerning the divine essence; but created if we consider the hypostases. What could be more monstrous than this? Arius, indeed, saying that the Son and the Spirit are creatures, abstained from blasphemies against the Father, openly contending against Him; but these, by simply asserting that the hypostasis is a creature, as gathered from their opinion, dishonor even the Person of the Father. Just as essence and hypostasis are not the same among theologians, and both are uncreated, but it in no way contradicts that there is one uncreated divine nature, so also, while preserving the difference between the divine essence and the divine operation, since this too is uncreated, it will not be discordant to say there is one uncreated, namely, the divine nature. By the same reasons you avoid what seems absurd, we will also remedy such infirmity.

5. However, that the divine nature, which I say is the common essence of the three Persons, is not entirely identical with the divine hypostasis, nor with its natural and essential operation, and that all these are distinguished from one another, we will briefly discuss. Firstly, we affirm that the divine essence and the divine hypostasis are not entirely the same. For the divine in terms of nature is one, in terms of hypostases is not one. But that which is partly one and partly not one, how could it be identical? Furthermore, the divine nature is common to the three hypostases; each of these, however, is proper to itself. But the common and the proper are clearly not identical. Moreover, according to nature, the divine is not distinguished, but united; however, according to hypostases, it is distinguished, not united. That these are different needs no words, unless someone simply says that affirmation and negation are the same thing. Moreover, by confessing the uniqueness of the divine essence, we are far removed from the polytheism of the pagans; by confessing the three Persons, we flee from the folly of the Jews. Now, Judaism is one thing, and polytheism is another. Finally, if the divine essence and the divine hypostasis are the same,

they do not differ at all. Therefore, if there is one essence, there will also be one hypostasis, and why then do we persecute Sabellius? Or, because there are three hypostases, there will be as many natures, and this opinion is not far from Arius.

6. However, the holy and ecumenical first Council, while not ignorant of the distinction between the divine essence and the divine hypostasis, says: Those who say... that the Son of God is from another hypostasis or essence, the holy catholic and apostolic Church anathematizes. Using this testimony, Basil the Great, in his letters, discussing the Fathers of Nicaea, says: They did not say that essence and hypostasis are the same. For if these words showed one and the same notion, what need was there for both? But, evidently, the Fathers themselves, with some denying that the Son is from the Father's essence, and others asserting that He is neither from the essence, but from some other hypostasis, rejected both opinions as foreign to the ecclesiastical sense.

7. Therefore, it is apparent from what has been said that essence and hypostasis are different. Concerning the distinction of the divine essence and the natural properties⁸ inherent to it, we say the following: The essence is one, but these properties are multiple. But multitude and unity are different. For the operations of the Spirit are ineffable due to their greatness, and innumerable due to their multitude. For how shall we understand those things that were before the ages? What were its operations before the intelligible creation? Furthermore, the divine essence is the cause; but the properties arise from it, as from a cause. For they do not say that the essence is from wisdom, but that wisdom is from the essence. Now, what causes is one thing, and what is caused is another. Moreover, the divine essence is unparticipable; the divine operation, however, is participable. When God said He had elevated us to the participation of His goodness, just as He did not communicate His essence, so too He did not communicate the knowledge of His essence. But that which cannot be participated in is one thing, and that which can be participated in is another. Additionally, the Son and the Spirit indeed come from the divine essence, but not creation; for creation does not come from the divine essence, but from the divine operation, namely, from the will. But creation is one thing, and the Son is another. Therefore, the divine operation is also something different from the divine essence;

⁸ In this number and the following two, Cabasilas takes divine properties and divine operations as one and the same thing. Hence, unless I am mistaken, his fallacy of argumentation arises. But pay attention, please, to the third observation placed by me at the end (page 262 ff.).

for the eternal generation of the Son is the work of the divine nature, but creation is the work of the divine operation. And again: Although creation was made after those things, it is not from the divine essence. Moreover, if essence and operation are identical, the essence of God will be participable. But this is the chief heresy of the Massalians. Furthermore, if essence and operation are the same, just as we have the knowledge of divine goodness and divine wisdom, we will likewise have the knowledge of the divine essence. And thus, he who said that no one, except the Only Begotten Son and the Holy Spirit, can know this, is mistaken.

8. But concerning the difference between the divine essence and its natural operations, this suffices. As for the distinction between each divine hypostasis and the divine operations, we speak thus. There are indeed three divine hypostases; but the operations are innumerable due to their multitude. However, that which has limits and that which is infinite are entirely different. Furthermore, each hypostasis is proper to itself; but all the operations are common to each hypostasis. Moreover, each of the hypostases subsists by itself; but the divine operation does not subsist by itself. Additionally, the divine operation is participable, but the divine hypostasis is unparticipable. Athanasius the Great clearly states this: "Just as power and kingdom and whatever else is proposed when speaking of God are not called individual hypostasis by name, but are explained properly according to the essence around the hypostasis; so also virtue and operation are referred to around the hypostasis."

9. However, that the divine is uncreated not only concerning the essence but also the hypostases and the natural and essential operations; indeed, concerning the essence, it is not even necessary to argue, since even the adversaries themselves confess this. But concerning the hypostases, the divine is also uncreated. For we sing with the Church: "I celebrate with hymns the three uncreated"⁹. But even regarding the divine operation, the divine is said to be uncreated. The testimony of the holy and universal Synods, the fifth and the sixth, which declare the divine operation to be uncreated, will suffice. For when Origen affirmed that creatures are coeternal with the Creator and provided the reason, namely, that God would otherwise fall under change, transitioning from not creating to creating; the holy and universal fifth Synod, constituted against Origen himself, pronounced: "God, transitioning from not creating to creating,

⁹ See, if you wish, what I had to discuss on all these matters in the fourth observation at the end (page 264 ff.).

was not changed according to nature, but according to potency, or rather, not even according to potency" ¹⁰ ; for He always had the potency to create, but He actualized this potency when He, God, willed. Therefore, in saying: "He was not changed according to nature but according to potency," it showed a distinction in God between divine essence and potency; but in adding: "He always had the potency to create," it proclaimed that even this potency is uncreated. Again, when Origen blasphemously asserted that the potency of God should be considered limited, and that the limitation of it should not be removed even under the pretext of piety, for He made as many as He could foresee, the same holy and universal Synod raised its voice against him: "If anyone says or speaks that the potency of God is limited, let him be anathema." And the sixth holy and ecumenical Synod also explicitly stated that the divine operation is uncreated. For it says in the Acts: "Christ, being one, has natural operations, both divine and human, uncreated and created, as true and perfect God, true and perfect Man."

10. However, if anyone were to object, asserting that these things are indeed very true but pose a difficulty in why the divine is referred to as both one and three, with multiple members and varied, and that this is also said by theologians, and how these can stand together without any arising dissonance; we assert this: What we worship is a monarchy; for we believe in one God, but not one in number. This is the narrowness of Judaism, but one in nature; for the divine is not one in number, but three. It is also said to be of multiple members and varied; this, indeed, concerning the hypostases, and the other because of the properties that naturally and eminently belong to God. Here is the proof of such things. Regarding the uniqueness of nature: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one." Regarding the triplicity of hypostasis: "Baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Regarding the divine properties inherent to nature: "All that the Father has is mine; and I have been glorified in them." Given these things, if we were to say that the divine is one in number and again not one in number, but three or more, it would be an open contradiction and our assertion would be far from all truth. But now, since the oneness is taken from nature, whereas the numerical aspect is not from nature, but from the hypostases and natural operations, the apparent contradiction is resolved and we remain in agreement with ourselves and the truth. However, reason shows that these are uncreated, and no

¹⁰ You may notice that these words rather go against Nilus. Therefore, it is in vain that he immediately draws from the words of the Council a distinction in God between essence and potency.

distinction among theologians is recognized between the uncreated and the uncreated.

11. Conversely, there is one uncreated, one God, who naturally and eminently possesses all these things, and has graciously revealed them to us through the words of the Holy Spirit. However, the many things said about God, in their appropriate diversity, do not allow you to rest peacefully, and you form thoughts about divided and separated things that are removed in place. Why, then, do you not cease to be disturbed if you call one the Father, another the Son, and yet another the Spirit Paraclete, and assert each of them to be a perfect God? Yet, the diversity here clearly falls upon the hypostases, and no commonality is considered within them. Out of reverence for God revealing these things, you remain silent and without hesitation assent to the dogma of the unity of God. Why, then, do you not fully adhere to this belief yourself, also accepting that it has been said of the natural operations: "All that the Father has is mine; and I have been glorified in them," and thinking that these are both many and uncreated? For either it is not permissible to doubt when it concerns the natural operations, just as you do not doubt when it concerns the hypostases, or it is permissible not to believe these things, since you do not wish to think rightly about them.

12. However, you admit that you do not know how these things are to be understood. Very well; indeed, all are ignorant. But the remedy for ignorance is not to disbelieve, but to seek to learn. For it is written: "Seek, and you shall find." You will find these things under the discipline of the Holy Spirit. Listen to the theologians: Number introduces difference, not separation, by mental operation, which unites by distinguishing. For the essence will not be separated from the hypostasis simply because essence and hypostasis are different; nor, because essence and operation are not the same, should the divine operation be separated from the divine essence, but the distinction is made by the mind's fiction, while the union is real and inseparable. For he says that operation exists around all things, but the essence is constituted inseparably from it.

13. Truly, consider how fire has the power to illuminate, but also to heat, to ascend, to soften, and to dry; and many other things can be said about it regarding its essence and its diverse effects. For it heats many things, but only illuminates those that are visible; and indeed, it illuminates instantly, while it communicates its heating effect over time. But if the heating and illuminating powers were the same,

those participating in the heat would also participate in the light; but the hand perceives the heat, yet not the light. What then? Because these powers differ from each other, will the illuminating power exist without the heating power, or will you consider the heating power as separate from the illuminating power? By no means.

14. But if such things are found in corporeal matters, distinct in reason, yet not separated in reality, what shall we say of divine matters, in which those things that unite surpass and hold dominion over those that divide, and divisions and separations cannot be thought of in any way? And let these things be said, with faith leading the way, through which the truth is revealed to the worthy.

III. OBSERVATIONS

We know, therefore, from reading it, this famous writing of Nilus Cabasilas, the rocky foundation of Palamite theology, presented by him without adornments, like the bare framework of a modern concrete building. But the title alone, even at the risk of being accused of a lack of sobriety, undoubtedly reveals the desired goal of its author.

We must necessarily make some observations regarding the theological value of this famous document, as it seems to emerge from a moderately attentive reading.

1) The first is that Nilus' reasoning is quite clear at first glance; but not so much if we delve a little deeper. Let's see it as we analyze his ideas.

Let's examine the value of the word nature, according to the theological rule set by the Thessalonian (num. 1), and we will find that it can encompass three meanings. Because such a term, either denotes a person, or the natural properties of that person; but it can also, in matters of the divine, designate God Himself (num. 2). And then he deduces: given that the saying of the Nyssean must be understood in this latter sense, and finding in the word God everything that is in Him—essence, persons, and natural operations—what harm can come to those who maintain that the divine essence and its operation are diverse, considering that they regard the latter as uncreated as the essence itself? (num. 3).

But this clarity of presentation becomes clouded little by little, as he gradually pours out, drop by drop, the content of his new theology. First, with the peculiar affirmation, manifesting a great scandal (num. 4), that the divine Persons would also have to be created if the divine operation, distinct from the essence, were created, because the Persons and the divine essence are not the same, according to theologians; and then, with the multiple proofs of his assertion (num. 5), which are nothing more than true sophisms¹¹, even though Nilus attempts to corroborate everything with the authority of Councils and Holy Fathers (num. 6).

The same confusion appears throughout this double series of arguments, which attempt, according to Nilus, to show that there is diversity, on the one hand, between the divine essence and the divine properties or operations (num. 7), and,

¹¹ The writings of JOHN KYPARISSIOTES, known as the Wise, and DEMETRIUS CYDONIUS are aimed at uncovering and refuting such deceptive arguments; these unpublished documents will be presented in successive articles.

on the other, between those same divine operations and each of the Persons of the Most Holy Trinity (num. 8).

Upon closer examination, all this is not as clear as it first seemed; even less so in what follows. Why this effort to prove now (num. 9) that the divine essence, the divine Persons, and the natural operations of divinity are something uncreated? Not precisely because of the first two members of this trilogy, which Nilus naturally presupposes, but because of the last one, the cornerstone of his discourse. That is why he believes he strengthens his thought with the way of expressing the fifth and sixth ecumenical Councils—second of Constantinople and second also of Nicaea—in the case against Origen. But this is merely a support for the reasoning pursued by Cabasilas. It is as if he were saying: we have three things in God: essence, persons, operations; all of them uncreated and all included in the Nyssean assertion that nothing is uncreated except the nature of God. Consequently, the enemies of Palamas cannot appeal to the saying of the Bishop of Nyssa to oppose the divine operation as created; they cannot, because these three things exist in God (num. 10), and all of them, though a mystery, form but one uncreated (num. 11). Precisely because all this constitutes a high mystery—the unity of the divine essence without contradiction to the plurality of divine Persons and divine operations, as Nilus tells us, we must confess it thus (num. 12), always docile to the voice of the Holy Spirit, who will come to remedy our ignorance if we ask Him.

Moreover, the leading theologian of Palamism concludes victoriously (num. 13-14), suggesting that even in such grave matters, we can infer from what happens in the sensible world of things: the example of fire is very clear, being one in itself, yet encompassing so many operations, greatly differing, such as illuminating, heating, ascending, softening things, or drying them.

Such is the structure of Nilus Cabasilas' writing, so simple in appearance, so harmonious and robust in its fundamental lines, yet so confusing, weak, and even false when its arguments are slowly examined in the light of faith, which he also says has guided his pen; the faith that, in his words, "always reveals to the worthy the path of truth."

2) The second observation, quite logical, arises from the very title of the document. Nilus asserts that the Acindynians misunderstand the saying of Saint Gregory of Nyssa that nothing is uncreated except the divine nature. Nothing more obvious, therefore, than for the reader to expect to find in

Cabasilas' writing the correct exegesis of the quoted words. A completely failed hope! It is true that at the end of number 2, Nilus affirms that Saint Gregory, in that passage, gives the word "φύσις" the equivalence of God. But one may ask: did not the adversaries of Palamas also understand it in the same sense? Why does he not provide even a well-placed passage from Barlaam, Acindynus, Nicephorus Gregoras, Argyrus, or many others who theologically contested the surprising doctrinal orientation of the innovative monk of Athos? Moreover, why does he not present the entire patristic passage and show us, through the whole context, that in the word "φύσις - θεός" the Nyssean intended to encompass the Palamite trilogy: essence, persons, natural properties, or natural operations?

Is this what Saint Gregory of Nyssa expressed so apodictically in the proposed formula? Let's examine it for a moment.

The Saint describes, and refutes at the same time, with great detail and without any haste, the false concept of divinity that the heretic Eunomius had formed, starting from the word "ἀγεννησία," as if the Son—precisely because He is the Son, does not bear the title of "ἀγέννητος"—therefore ceases to be God ¹² . And then, wanting to positively declare something about the divine nature, he says against Eunomius that any anthropomorphism must be rejected from it, although to make ourselves understood we might say, for example, that God spoke, that He imposed names on things, and other similar expressions. But it is said in Scripture, objects Eunomius: "God said: let there be light, let there be a firmament, let the waters be gathered," etc. ¹³ .

"Pay close attention," responds the Nyssean: "To whom is He saying this? To Himself, imposing a command upon Himself? And what need did He have for an audible voice for this, when even we humans do not require it in such cases? Nor was a voice necessary for the Father to speak to the Son, which must have a medium to reach the listener. But what could that medium be? If we think," says Saint Gregory literally, "that the Father pronounces His words by mouth and that in the ear of the Son the hearing occurs, what medium will we suppose carries the voice of the Father to the ear of the Son? That medium must be one of two things: it must be created or uncreated. Created it cannot be, since God utters those words 'Let there be light' when no creature yet exists, and yet the Son does. But uncreated it cannot be either, «ἄκτιστον δὲ πλὴν τῆς θείας

¹² See S. GREGORY OF NYSSA, Book XII/2 against Eunomius, MG 45, 916-917.

¹³ Ibid., 977-981. (Cf. GEN. 1:3; 6; 9).

φύσεως, οὐδέν», for outside the divine nature, nothing is uncreated. Therefore, that medium does not exist; therefore, there is no distance between the Father and the Son, which is what the reasoning of the Nyssean aims at, but rather a most perfect union, or rather, the intermingling of the intelligent with the intelligent by the identity of wills." ¹⁴

Could Nilus Cabasilas tell us where, in this passage of Saint Gregory of Nyssa, there is even the slightest hint of the divine operation? Therefore, the only thing we must understand as uncreated in this passage, given the equivalence "φύσις - θεός" of the Palamite theologian, is the common essence of the three divine Persons in opposition to that imaginary medium that does not exist. And it is exactly how the adversaries of Gregory Palamas, whom Nilus wants to refute here, understood it. It is not enough, to understand otherwise, to add, in number 5 of his writing, that the author of this saying is well aware of the distinction between the three things—essence, persons, operation—and that he also maintains that it is uncreated. This is merely asserting without any proof, when it was so necessary to at least provide a passage from the works of the Nyssean in such a sense, to be able to judge with full knowledge of the facts. But it would have been very difficult to do so.

Let us say in passing, to conclude this point, that Nilus Cabasilas allowed himself to be carried away on this occasion by the usual method with which Palamite authors proceed, sometimes asserting apodictically, without more, and other times, supporting their ideas only on the material sound of patristic or scriptural expressions, without considering the context. The present case confirms me in this appreciation, which I had already formulated previously, when dealing, in the matters of grace, with some of the texts of the Holy Fathers cited by Gregory Palamas ¹⁵.

3) But let's move on to a third observation. I would say it is intimately connected to the preceding one, which can perhaps be considered a necessary explanation to some extent.

When the Palamite theologian speaks of divine operations, what is it that comes to his mind? To what things does he apply the appellation of operation? It is not clear, far from it, in Nilus' writing; nor is it clear in any of Palamas'

¹⁴ «Ἀλλὰ τὴν τοῦ νοητοῦ πρὸς τὸν νοητόν, διὰ ταυτότητος τῶν θελημάτων, ἔνωσιν καὶ ἀνάκρασιν» (ibid., 981 BC).

¹⁵ Cfr. M. CANDAL, *Palamite Innovations in the Doctrine of Grace*. Studi e Testi, 123: Miscellanea GrOV. MERCATI, vol. III. Città del Vaticano 1946, pp. 87 ff.

works known so far, as far as I can tell from my frequent study.

For Nilus Cabasilas, if we refer to number 7 of the present document, divine operations would be the same as "divine properties naturally belonging to the divine essence"; properties, which, by the examples given in the patristic testimonies on which the writer bases his arguments, would be such as the divine "σοφία," "ἀγαθότης," and "θέλησις." That is to say, it seems quite clear, the attributes of the divinity. In this, he fully conforms to his teacher Palamas, who, in chapters 82 and 83 of the One Hundred and Fifty Chapters—his *Summa Theologica*, so to speak—describes "the goodness, wisdom, power, divinity, and majesty of God" as divine operations, distinct from the essence, as they are knowable by creatures, while the essence is not, but they surround it "πάντα τὰ περὶ οὐσίαν" as something inseparable from it ¹⁶ .

And, well; if this is understood by divine operation, what is particular about it being considered uncreated and eternal? Was it not Palamas himself, who, contradicting himself greatly ¹⁷ , presents in chapter 34 of the aforementioned work those same divine attributes of goodness, life, wisdom, eternity, and beatitude not as something distinct from the essence, nor as simply united with it, but entirely identified with it? So much so, that he explicitly states that what can be thought of as good in God resides in Him, or rather, He is the very goodness..., and the very life, and the very wisdom..., and in turn, these things do not differ from each other, because goodness is wisdom, etc.; to deduce, consequently, with meridian clarity, that "in God, goodness is His essence," as he could likewise affirm of the other attributes ¹⁸ . Who can deny, under such circumstances, that these divine operations, as Nilus calls them with Gregory Palamas, are something uncreated? Then it is evident that this is not the point of

¹⁶ GREGORY PALAMAS, *Capita 150 physica, theologica, moralia et practica*. Cap. 82-83 MG 150, 1180 BD.

¹⁷ In previous studies, I have already pointed out some of these contradictions in the leader of the new doctrine. Cf., e.g., *Palamite Innovations... Studi e Testi*, 123, pp. 82-83, where mention is made of Palamas' contradiction on the point we now address. Compare chapter 34 of the One Hundred and Fifty Chapters (MG 150, 1142 D-1144 A) with chapter 118 (*ibid.*, 1201 D-1204 A) and with another very characteristic passage from the Dialogue "Teophanes" by the same Palamas (*ibid.*, 948 BC). Another equally obvious contradiction about the divine processions can be seen exposed in my work *Nilus Cabasilas et theologia S. Thomae de processione Spiritus Sancti*. *Studi e Testi*, 116. Città del Vaticano 1945, pp. 123-124.

¹⁸ PALAMAS, *One Hundred and Fifty Chapters...* chap. 34 MG 150, 1142 D-1144 A.

difficulty, which is, by the way, what in Palamite writings engenders so much confusion.

The difficulty arises, or so I believe, from the fluctuation in the theology of divine attributes that Palamas always had and transmitted in its entirety to his faithful followers ¹⁹ ; but moreover, from including in the rank of divine operation, and with that same name of "ἐνέργεια," many other things directly related to creatures, such as grace, deification, the glory of the divinity shown to men, or, in one word, the Taboric light. Palamas designates all this with the name of divine operations, and they are, in his view, the operative attributes, which he almost exclusively deals with in his writings. It will suffice to consider, to be convinced, chapters 68 and 69 of the One Hundred and Fifty Chapters ²⁰ , where he explicitly speaks of grace as one of the divine operations, which can be infinite, unlike the essence, which is one, as stated in the following chapter ²¹ . As for the Taboric light, it is the same. It is also one of the divine operations really distinct from the essence but inseparable from it, eternal, uncreated, always shining, as it is identified with deifying grace, and likewise with the glory of the Lord and the beatitude of the Saints ²² .

All of this was indeed denied by the valiant champions of the traditional doctrine, who asserted that it was uncreated and eternal. But of all this, which was the axis of the fierce disputes of the 14th century Byzantine period, there is not a word in Cabasilas' writing, which is why it is so disorienting. Why did he do it this way? Did he perhaps foresee, being the good theologian that he was, the fragility of the Palamite position on such a central point, and thus preferred to accumulate arguments to generally prove that divine operations are uncreated? Who would contradict him if the examples he provided were the divine perfections? Are these not the very essence of God?

¹⁹ This was very well noted by M. JUGIE in his *Theol. Dogmat. Christ. Orient.*, II, Paris 1933, pp. 78-79.

²⁰ MG 150, 1169 AC.

²¹ Chap. 70 MG 150, 1169 CD.

²² o avoid multiplying the citations, which would be countless, from Palamite writings, it is enough to cite, as a compendium of them all, the Anathemas and Acclamations of the Sunday, so-called, of Orthodoxy, introduced in 1352 to make the new doctrine official. They can be seen in non-Catholic editions of the Triodion, and a good summary of them, more handy, in M. JUGIE, *Theol. Dogmat. Christ. Orient.*, II, pp. 132-137.

4) Fourth and final observation. We cannot overlook Nilus' very a priori assertion, as I believe, that the Holy Fathers sometimes tell us there is only one uncreated thing, and other times, that there are three ²³. Cabasilas seems concerned with the idea, fundamental to his aim, of showing how reasonable it is that the divine operation is also uncreated and not the essence alone. Therefore, if he demonstrates that, in some way, it can be said that there is more than one uncreated thing, he takes great advantage on his path.

But it is clear that in sound theology, the formula presented by Nilus is inadmissible. In the place where he adduces it, the word "τὸ ἄκτιστον" (τρία τὰ ἄκτιστα), precisely because it has the article before it and throughout the context, must surely be understood as a noun and, on the other hand, it seems that it can only be applied to the three Persons of the most blessed Trinity. Yet faith assures us that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not three uncreated beings, but one, in the same way that they are not more than one Omnipotent, one Eternal, and one Lord. Just as when we say that the Father is God, and that the Son is God, and that the Holy Spirit is also God; and, with all this, we do not think of three gods, but of one.

Therefore, it is easy to find patristic texts, and more texts, that indicate the first point to us, that is, that the uncreated is one alone; but it is entirely impossible to find a single passage that, supporting the affirmation of the second point, comes to tell us that the uncreated things are three. It would seem that Nilus Cabasilas took great care not to allege any explicit testimony in favor of his thesis. For example, we refer to Saint John of Damascus, a classical theologian in explaining doctrinal terminology of the faith—a true precursor, we might say, of scholasticism—and we find that, wanting to treat what God is at the beginning of his great book *On the Orthodox Faith*, he assures us in terminis that we must believe in one God, Omnipotent, Eternal, who is "ἐν ἄκτιστον," the only uncreated thing that can exist ²⁴. But in vain do we continue reading the whole chapter to find the formula "τρία τὰ ἄκτιστα," even though he is describing, one by one, the three divine Persons. Only when giving the meaning of the word "ἀγέννητος," as opposed to the similar "ἀγέννητος," does he affirm that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit agree only in the signification of the former, which means "non-factus," or in other words, uncreated, and only then does he apply the voice "ἄκτιστοι" as an adjective to the three

²³ Read the document's number carefully.

²⁴ S. JOHN OF DAMASCUS, *De Fide Orthod.*, 1, 8 MG 94. 808 BC.

divine Persons, equivalent to the other "ἀγέννητοι." "Ὁμοούσιον γάρ τε καὶ ἄκτιστοι ὑπάρχοντες" ²⁵ .

But if Nilus does not cite any passage from the Fathers, it seems that he finds support later in his discourse ²⁶ in what appears to be a citation of a liturgical hymn, with the particularity that there is no doubt it refers to the three divine Persons. "Ἀλλὰ καὶ κατὰ τὰς ὑποστάσεις," he says, "τὸ θεῖον ἄκτιστον, ψάλλομεν γὰρ ἐπ' ἐκκλησίας· Τρία ἄκτιστα ὕμνο."

And indeed, the reader asks in amazement: but where is it possible to find such a formula? And here again I must confess that my search through the liturgical books has been entirely fruitless. For I find, indeed, countless expressions, all of them theologically legitimate in this or a similar form: "Ἄγιε Πάτερ, ἄγιε Λόγε, (ἄγιες Πνεῦμα, παναγία ἄκτιστε, Τριάς ἀμέριστε" ²⁷ , where the word "ἄκτιστε" affects collectively in the singular, therefore, the entire Holy Trinity. Sometimes I even find the literary form closest to what Nilus presents, as in this passage: "Τριάδα σέβω τὴν ἄκτιστον" ²⁸ . What else? Sometimes we even stumble upon the form suggested by the word "τρία" in these liturgical hymns, as in the following case: "Συνάναρχα τρία... ὁμόθρονα μὲν, ἀμερίστου μιᾶς δὲ θεότητος... δοξάζω... τὰ πρόσωπα" ²⁹ , or in another, which says: "Τρία μιᾶς φύσεως ὕμνῳ πρόσωπα αὐθυπόστατα" ³⁰ . But it is very clear that, finding in these phrases the explicitly stated noun "πρόσωπα," the words "συνάναρχα" and "αὐθυπόστατα" can only be understood as adjectives, which multiply, not according to the form, but according to the persons they affect. On the other hand, the substantivized form brought by Nilus Cabasilas, "τρία τὰ ἄκτιστα," does not appear in the liturgical books, not even once. We can see, therefore, how weak the argumentation of the "ἄκρος θεολόγος" of Palamism is.

With these observations, I believe we can appreciate the true value of this document, fundamental in the new theology of the 14th century, in the separated Byzantine Church, which, after six centuries, has not yet gone out of fashion.

²⁵ Ibid., 817 B.

²⁶ Take note of number 9 of the document.

²⁷ Minca, I, 13 September (ed. Rome 1888), p. 148.

²⁸ Minea, II, 6 December (ed. Rome 1892), p. 395.

²⁹ Minea, II, *ibid.*, p. 399.

³⁰ Triodion, Office of the Saturday of "τῆς ἀπόκρεω" (ed. Rome 1879), p. 22.

Rome, 25 March 1957 Annunciation of the Virgin Mary
MANUEL CANDAL, S.J